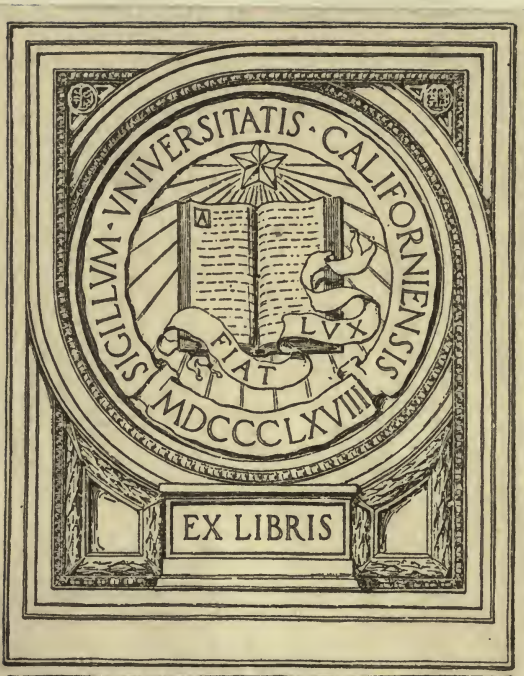
THE BALLADES OF THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

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THE BALLADES OF THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

Mélicerte, poète à la bouche de miel.

SWINBURNE, *Au Tombeau de Banville.*

The Ballades of Théodore de Banville

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

ARCHIBALD T. STRONG

OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE

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'SONNETS AND SONGS,' 'NATURE IN MEREDITH AND WORDSWORTH,'
'PERADVENTURE, A BOOK OF ESSAYS'

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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1913

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TRANSLATOR'S DEDICATION

TO

MY BROTHER

AYLMER CECIL STRONG

THESE VERSIONS

ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

288325

In putting forth these versions of Banville's Ballades, I have wished to bring English readers more closely into touch with one of the sweetest, if not one of the greatest, of French poets. Two or three of the Ballades will already be familiar in England through the charming renderings of the late Mr. Andrew Lang, one of whose refrains, which I was not able myself to better or to equal, I have gratefully adapted to my own use. Beyond this I am not consciously indebted to him, or to any other translator. I am in debt, however, to Messrs. Walter Murdoch and Ernest Scott, of Melbourne, and to Mr. J. Griffyth Fairfax, for one or two valuable suggestions, and I herewith tender them my hearty thanks.

So far as I am aware, no complete translation has so far been published in England of the Ballades of Théodore de Banville. In issuing this one I would like to emphasize what Banville himself says in his Preface as to the difficulty of writing a good Ballade. The difficulty becomes acute when the Ballade has to be translated, as the great difficulty of finding rhymes is aggravated by the necessity of keeping in touch with the original. I do not claim indulgence on this account for any shortcomings of expression or for any failure to render fully the spirit of the French : but I do claim a larger freedom of treatment than is generally accorded to translations in less difficult forms, and I claim, too, the privilege of sacrificing the letter occasionally for the sake of retaining the spirit in its fulness. Nobody, I fancy, would have been more willing to accord or to employ this privilege than Banville himself : and nobody can be more conscious of the shortcomings of these versions than his translator.

A. T. S.

Melbourne, *June* 1913.

THE BALLADE OF BANVILLE

In the Dedication to his *Trente-Six Ballades Joyeuses*, Théodore de Banville states that he has composed the Ballades after the fashion of François Villon, and in his Preface he claims to have followed his master's model even in his choice of subjects. Nobody who knows Villon's poetry well can fail to realise that this claim is literally true of such Ballades as those of the Holy Virgin, the Maid of the Inn, and the Women of Paris, each of which has its exact prototype in the work of the earlier genius. There are also snatches of Villon's music throughout the poems, and there is at least something of his spirit in the Ballades of Good Doctrine, of Himself, and of his Mother, in all of which Banville exults in the free vagabondage of a poet's life. But the spirit of the Thirty-Six Ballades is at once something more and something less than what Banville declares it to be. In his Preface he defines his own Ballade as being that of Villon with the addition of the Nine-

teenth-Century spirit, and a touch of Balzac and Gavarni. It is just this additional touch which we find in the Double Ballades of the Follies of Paris, and of Good Folk: but there is more in the matter than so.

In the first place, as far as surface technique goes, Banville's line is infinitely more trim and finished than Villon's. One of the most notable characteristics of Villon's poetry is the occurrence of lines of a curious everyday simplicity which is the outcome of his fundamental realism of thought and form, and seems to put the reader swiftly and intimately in touch with the poet's age and mind. Banville never would, and never could, have written lines like the second of these :—

> Helas! et le bon roi d'Espaigne,
> Duquel je ne sçay pas le nom,

or the third of these :—

> Princes nommez, anciens, jouvenceaulx,
> Impetrez-moi graces et royaulx sceaux
> Et me montez en quelque corbillon.

Villon, like the Alcaeus of Banville's Ballade, smote out song upon his anvil with huge and careless strokes: but Banville, as he himself tells us, went about his work with cunning forethought, and laboured hard and lovingly and long upon the song-gold "with file and crafty chisel and hammer good at need." Hence the fairylike perfection of his

Ballades, each of which has the look and the ring of some delicate cup chased exquisitely in silver. Technically speaking, they are without flaw or blemish.

But if they are without these, they are also without the profounder qualities of Villon's poetry. "He was so fair a creature of God," says Anatole France of Banville, "that he needed not reason to make him delightful." One could hardly even say of him, as Goethe said of Byron, "so bald er reflectirt, er ist ein Kind," for Banville was a child who never even approached reflection save in a spirit of the lightest dalliance. And if he lacked reflection, he also lacked that white fervour of inspiration which lifts some of Villon's ballades high among the world's great poetry. He never could have achieved the tense and poignant realism of the "Ballade des Pendus": and his Ballade of the Holy Virgin, for all its finite beauty, is a different and a far lesser thing than those lines of haunting simplicity which Villon in his Ballade on the same theme, put into the mouth of his old Mother :—

Femme je suis povrette et ancienne,
Ne riens ne sçay ; oncques lettre ne leuz :
Au monstier voy dont suis parroissienne
Paradis painct, où sont harpes et luz,
Et ung enfer où damnez sont boulluz :
L'ung me faict paour, l'autre joye et liesse.

> La joye avoir fais-moy, haulte Deesse,
> A qui pecheurs doivent tous recourir,
> Comblez de foy, sans faincte ne paresse.
> En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

Equally outside his scope is the tremendous line of the "Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis," "Où sont-ilz, Vierge Souveraine?" in which Villon's inspiration flames forth, fierce and ecstatic, before it sinks to the low, still beauty of the Envoy. The difference between the two men is revealed by a glance at the light and lively wench who was Banville's Margot, and at the Grosse Margot of Villon, the heroine—save the mark!—of what is perhaps in its bitter and passionate cynicism the most terrible poem ever written.

Banville's genius spent itself in joy and in the love of all things lovely: but Villon, for all his moods of mockery and lust and rebellion, was—in all reverence be it written—a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. There is no more false pronouncement in all literature than Stevenson's reference to his "matchless insincerity": strong sincerity of feeling is indeed, as M. Gaston Paris has pointed out, the main characteristic of his higher flights of poetry. Cynic, desperado, and lecher though he was, he was still capable of deep affection, and of remorse which was none the less heartfelt because it often took the shape of scorn for himself and for all

men and things on earth. And it is just this depth of feeling and of scorn which gives his poetry a higher inspiration than Banville could ever have hoped to compass.

In many of his moods, indeed, Banville has more in common with Villon's charming and royal contemporary Charles d'Orléans than with Villon himself: and when he sings exultantly of his calling as a lyric poet, and sees in rhymes and flowers and freedom the only way of peace and joy, surely he is inspired by the playful spirit of him who bade "Soussi, soing, et merencolie," go hang, and uttered this gay defiance to those who had rejoiced at his reported death :—

> Pour ce, de Dieu soient maudis
> Ceulx qui sont dolens de veoir
> Qu'encore est vive la souris.

I may note in passing that his love of roses puts him in special touch with Ronsard, with whose fair spirit he has otherwise so much in common. The refrain of his Ballade of the Rose has the lilt and almost the very words with which the older singer begins his "Louanges de la Rose et de la Violette" :—

> Sur tous parfums j'aime la rose
> Dessur l'espine en may declose,
> Et l'odeur de la belle fleur
> Qui de sa première couleur
> Pare la terre, quand la glace
> Et l'hyver au soleil font place.

To return to Villon, in one curious respect Banville has the advantage of the older and greater poet—in his love, namely, of the open air and all its scenes and creatures. Villon hated the open air: he had had too much of it during the long summer months which he spent under the ward of Thibaut d'Aussigny on a diet of bread and water at the bottom of his "dungeon-ditch" at Meung-sur-Loire: and one of his best turned and most shameless Ballades was written in defence of the town and its vices in opposition to the conventional praises of the simple life enunciated by Franc-Gontier. All Villon's scorn for the country and its ways appears in such a verse as this :—

> De gros pain bis vivent, d'orge, d'avoine,
> Et boivent eau, tout au long de l'année :
> Tous les oyseaulx d'icy en Babyloine
> A tel escot une seule journée
> Ne me tiendroient, non une matinée.
> Or s'esbate, de par Dieu, Franc-Gontier,
> Helène o luy, soubz le bel esglantier ;
> Si bien leur est, n'ay cause qu'il me poise ;
> Mais, quoy qu'il soit du laboureux mestier,
> Il n'est tresor que de vivre à son aise.

Just as Herrick hated Devon because it was too far from the Mermaid and Ben, so we may be sure that Villon hated the enforced rustication which made him run from Paris, leaving "a rag of his tails on every bush,"

and kept him at Roussillon, in tedious banishment from the "Pomme de Pin" and "L'Abreuvoir Popin" and Maistre Jean Cotard. The provinces were well enough for crib-cracking, especially if adverse circumstances made it impossible for one to pursue one's practice of the art at Paris ; and after his great burglary into the College of Navarre, Villon was only too glad to resort for a while to Angers, and to pass the time away by plotting to despoil a friend and colleague of his aged and religious uncle. But the provinces and their ways must always in the end repel the artist, whether he work with brush or pen or centre-bit : and in his fleshly appetites, if not in his artistic instincts, Villon ever ensued the "central note." In the matter of love he whose Goddess is Aphrodite Pandemos has little joy of dells and meads and rustic by-ways : at Roussillon there were no trulls and taverns on which a man might spend his all : onions, rye-bread and water, as he had informed Franc-Gontier, were no diet for a vagabond of taste : and to clinch the matter, there could be "no good girl's lip out of Paris."

Banville on the other hand was a more catholic lover, and could junket—at least in verse—with the lasses of Châlons as gaily as with Margot of Montrouge. He can, when

he wishes it, become utterly the poet of Paris : but so far is he from being universally this that he often turns from her in disgust to sing with whole-hearted joy of the forest and the sea. Perhaps the very best of all his Ballades is the sparkling and exultant one which he made as the wind swept him outward from the port of Havre. He was ever a lover of the forest : and we are told that even in his childhood at Font Georges, when weary of other play, he would accompany the singing of the birds amid the tree tops on a red violin. Throughout his Ballades he takes us repeatedly back to the woodland and its songsters and fairies : and among his finest poems are three which Villon could never have written—those of the Nightingale and the Hunting Horn, and the Progress of Diana through the woods at midnight. Banville, of course, loved the forest after a totally different fashion from her chief English poet, Meredith. To Meredith she was priestess and mistress in one, and beneath her beauty lay a whole religion. To Banville she was mistress only, and his sole feeling for her was passion for her elemental loveliness. She held no religion for him save one of song and joy and freedom. His forest was the fairy one of Fontainebleau : he had never set foot in the more deeply mystical Woods of Westermain.

There is perhaps a closer parallel between his worship of the sea and that of the great English poet with whom he had stood in the strong brotherhood of grief and genius at Gautier's grave. Both Swinburne and Banville loved the sea for her own sake, and not for any moral which they sought to read into her: and in the soul of each there was that which responded exultantly to her loveliness and joy and elemental might. Each adored her as a bride whose only dower was her all-sufficing beauty: and Banville, one fancies, would have had perfect sympathy with Swinburne's objection to Wordsworth, that he regarded nature as "a vegetable fit to shred into his pot and pare down like the outer leaves of a lettuce for didactic and culinary purposes."

Throughout his Ballades, as elsewhere, Banville claims with perfect justice to be a Greek at soul;

> Moi je me sens la cœur d'un ouvrier,
> Pareil à ceux qui florissaient en Grèce,

he exclaims: nor was his bond with the Greek spirit solely one of perfect craftsmanship. His mind was given up to that delight in concrete beauty which is a great part, though by no means the whole, of the Hellenic mind. His love of Greece and her

children and scenes and memories may be seen from a glance at his Ballades of the Warrior Maid, the Lily, and the Isle of Venus. Ever amid the fogs and foulness—as he deemed them—of his own day his eyes strove wistfully to recapture the glory of Troy and the magic beauty of Cythera. And when he tells of his own age, he is still a Greek at heart by virtue of the quality felt in him by Baudelaire—"that intensity of life through which the soul sings because it must, like the tree, the bird and the sea."

There are many sides, however, to the Greek spirit, and many interpretations of that spirit in French poetry: and the limitations of Banville as a Hellenist will be equally apparent whether we compare him with the great Hellenes of Greece herself, or with those of France. His finite perfection has small suggestion of the transcendent majesty of Æschylus, or of the high clear beauty of Sophocles, with its constant suggestion of infinity. His was the way of Anacreon rather than of Pindar: and his position becomes clear if we set him beside the great Frenchmen who, during the last century, have each in his own fashion infused the spirit of Greece into their country's poetry. He could never have compassed the simple fervour of Chénier's exquisite Idylls: "L'Aveugle," with its deep music of humanity,

would have been as completely beyond his power as its beautiful prose counterpart "Le Chanteur de Kymè" of Anatole France: nor can he vie in colour and clang and range with the "Khiron" or "Helène" or "Hylas" or—loveliest, perhaps, and most Landoresque of all—"La Robe du Centaure," of Leconte de Lisle, nor rival the marble splendour and might of Heredia's "L'Esclave" or "La Jeune Morte": while the whole spirit of his art, as may be seen from a glance at his Treatise on Poetry, is in exact opposition to the veiled and haunting symbolism of Mallarmé's "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune."

Yet for all that he had the right Greek joy in loveliness and the right Greek passion for expressing that joy in lines of perfect beauty. He was in spirit a poet of the Anthology, and Swinburne happily compares him with Simonides of Ceos. It was Swinburne too—the poet who has done more than any man yet to bring the spirit of French poetry home to England—who has written in Banville's own great metre the fairest praise that has appeared of him in the English tongue:—

Mother's love and rapture of the sea whose womb
Breeds eternal life of joy that stings like brine,
Pride of song and joy to dare the swimmer's doom,
Sorrow soft as sleep and laughter bright as wine,
Flushed and filled with fragrant fire his lyric line.
As the sea-shell utters, like a stricken chord,
Music uttering all the seas within it stored,

Poet well-beloved, whose praise our sorrow saith,
So thy songs retain thy soul and so record
Life so sweet as this that dies and casts out death.

Prince of song more sweet than honey, lyric lord,
Not thy France here only mourns a light adored,
One whose love-lit fame the world inheriteth.
Strangers too, now brethren, hail with hearts accord
Life so sweet as this that dies and casts out death.

AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

THIRTY-SIX MERRY BALLADES

TO PASS THE TIME AWAY

COMPOSED AFTER THE MANNER OF THE

EXCELLENT POET

FRANÇOIS VILLON

WHO LIVED BENEATH THE REIGN OF

KING LOUIS THE ELEVENTH

BY

THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

TO

THE MEMORY OF THE POET

ALBERT GLATIGNY

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

DIZAIN TO THE READER

Dear Reader, give me now my accolade !
Hard have I slaved to pleasure thee, I wis !
E'en as poor Villon wrought his fair ballade
In days of yore, and all to bring thee bliss,
So have I fashioned mine, and here it is.
I may not share with him thy benison
For to please all the world and's wife in one
Is hard, and none is mightier than his Master ;
But still I hope these rhymes, when all is done,
May cheer thy soul, and make thy blood run faster.

June 1873.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

My present ambition is to restore to France one of the most essentially French forms of poetry which have ever existed—the Ballade of Villon. Fostered with jealous care by Marot, this was revived by La Fontaine—who could not bear to see it die—in an age which, though it possessed many mighty poets, had utterly lost the sense of lyric rhythm. The glories of the Ballade are its clearness, joy, and swift and lilting music. Its sovereign characteristics are that it is easy to read and difficult to write: for though it presents some of the hardest problems of versification—summed in the necessity of writing four stanzas in parallel rhymes, which are hard to furnish in French,—it has this crowning merit, that a really well-made

Ballade (say, of Villon) seems to have cost no effort, but to have blossomed forth like a flower.

I need hardly add that the speech of the fifteenth century and that of to-day are utterly different. Now, whoever translates a poetic form from one idiom into another must take over all the traditions of his predecessors, even to their choice of subjects, as Horace took over his from the Greeks. This, then, I have had to do; yet all my efforts would have been fruitless had I not remained in my archaic setting the child of my own age, and infused into the stanza dear to Charles d'Orléans and Villon the Paris of Gavarni and Balzac, and the modern spirit. In a word, I have tried, not to call the Old Ballade from the dead, but to make her live again in a daughter who shall be her like, and to create the New Ballade. If I have succeeded in my aim—and God grant I may have—I shall deserve very little credit, coming as I do after the great lyrists of this century, who have fashioned our minds and metres, and shaped and levelled the remnant

of work they have left for us to finish. And yet I feel within me some little touch of craftsman's pride in that I have restored a kind of poem on which Victor Hugo has never laid his sovereign hand : for in the revival of poetic form 'tis so little he has left us to complete !

THÉODORE DE BANVILLE.

June 1873.

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THIRTY-SIX MERRY BALLADES

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

I

BALLADE OF REGRET FOR THE YEAR EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND THIRTY

I too will sing my ballade as of yore !
Ah, Poesy, ah, dying mother o' mine,
How in the good year Thirty did men pour
Their souls in song before thy feet divine !
For them the Docks, the Austrian Combine,
Consols, the talk of Change, were talk to tire,
For Musset sang, he of their hearts' desire,
And all at Beauty's very fount could quaff,
And all were still when Hugo swept the lyre !
—Now, well-away, 'tis over late to laugh !

Ah, days at Nodier's, sped for evermore!
The two Deschamps, whose music thrilled like wine,
And dear de Vigny graced us of their store,
And tragic Dorval, darling of the Nine,
Fired all the listless crowd with frenzy fine:
Then diamonds glowed on every sparkling spire,
—Did Glory pass, swift in her car of fire,
E'en had she brayed us 'neath her wheel like chaff
We sought her, daring all her scorn and ire—
Now, well-away, 'tis over late to laugh!

Craftsmen whom Visapour, that Eastern shore,
Knew, and the lords of many an orient mine,
Suing to Rosalys or Ellinor,
Wrought gallant deeds beneath her starry eyne:
—Soft incense of the South stole o'er the brine!
But now the rhyming sots of Mammon's choir
Sing not of love or lilies save for hire!
Their life is gain, their god the Golden Calf!
May Phoebus blast them with his lightning dire!
Now, well-away, 'tis over late to laugh!

ENVOI

Nay then myself, for Her to whom aspire
All poets' hearts, whose love made Dante sire
Of song, and Shakespeare Nature's fairer half,
Had laughed, and kissed her buskin in the mire!
—Now, well-away, 'tis over late to laugh!

II

BALLADE OF THE SOUTHERN LASSES

At wine, I love a comrade free,
I love a wit that takes its fling,
I love a pipe of Burgundy,
I love good money's laughing ring!
I love a lute of sprightly string,
And bumpers deep in curious glasses;
But most, for joy of junketing,
I love the lovely Southern lasses.

She lingers not by yonder lea
Where mateless maids their linen wring,
For hers are tresses fair to see
That stream and stray and clasp and cling
With every gust the breezes bring:
Her bosom whitest snow surpasses,
Her lips are ripe for gathering!
I love the lovely Southern lasses.

Sure ne'er was sweeter maid than she
In any clime where Love doth wing:

The buxom breast, the eyes of glee,
The tiny foot, a fairy thing!
'Twas wine that crowned her christening!
Here's to brown hair that falls in masses!
I'm bold and blithe as any king!
I love the lovely Southern lasses.

ENVOI

Prince, kids will run to grass in spring:
—Yet now I'm dull as any ass is,
And sure I've lost the heart to sing,
—I love the lovely Southern lasses!

III

BALLADE OF GOOD DOCTRINE

Glory is vain and unsubstantial meat.
To love the glitter of a laughing eye,
To kiss a winsome maiden's forehead sweet,
To lose one's spirit in the still blue sky :
From toil and care to loving arms to fly,
To birl at wine from purest vintage prest,
To love a humble soul that serves with zest,
To slumber sound and long till slumber cloy,
To deck bare walls with paintings of the best,
This is the only way of peace and joy.

With lovers' chat the flying hours to cheat,
To fashion royal robes of purple dye,
To gather many a posy trim and neat,
In Nature's lap on summer eves to lie :
To love the human form with ecstasy,

To weep for love throughout the night unblest,
To see a shape divine divinely drest,
To mock at money for a base alloy,
To live with Rabelais, having Mirth for guest,
This is the only way of peace and joy.

To snatch the fruit that falls before one's feet,
For vanished glories of Chevreuse to sigh,
To hear afar fair music's dainty beat,
In fields of old romance to live and die :
To follow peace with single heart and high,
To worship Beauty with her bounteous breast,
To hold one's heart for any venture prest,
To smoke 'neath lilac, far from life's annoy,
To polish verses that the years shall test,
This is the only way of peace and joy.

ENVOI

So, Prince, I scorn the harsh world's cruel hest,
And own me thrall of rhyme and mirth and jest,
Of song, of flowers, of Fancy's idlest toy :
Ay, Prince, of Poesy ! Lo, 'tis now confest !
This is the only way of peace and joy !

IV

BALLADE OF HIS LASS

Puppets on every hand I see
 Like Fagotin's, both small and great.
One to the planets bends the knee,
 Another early hunts and late
 All for a coin or curious plate,
All for a ring or musty screed :
 But I, who leave my life to Fate,
The lass I love is all I need.

The beggar for his farthing's fee
 Will hang all day at Dives' gate.
The rake, with frolic eyes and free,
 Will many a tale o' lust narrate :
 Some o'er the wine-bowl brawl and prate,
Some to the laurels late succeed
 With secret labour obstinate—
The lass I love is all I need.

Some to the maiden suitors be
 Whose babbling tongue doth ne'er abate,

But prattles on in silvery glee :
 Each hussy's worth her golden weight
 To her poor fool of rich estate,
For every trull will still be fee'd
 And every minx will find a mate—
The lass I love is all I need.

ENVOI

Let Rothschild keep his golden state,
 Leverrier all his heavens read,
And Nisard all his texts collate—
 The lass I love is all I need.

V

BALLADE OF A LADY

Muse of the brow so fair and free,
Craven Satire before thee flies,
Nor may Hate with her eyes of glee
War on thy lovely mysteries :
—Nay, for a lay my lips devise
Of a flower-mouth fair that blooms and blows
Beneath the passion of sunset skies :
Here all's brave as the red, red rose.

Fair as Helen's my maid to see.
Like wings o' the purple moth, her eyes
Are litten with lamps of faërie.
All my heart for her beauty cries :
There at the bosom's fall and rise,
Pale on the white o' the purest snows
Kissed by the sunlight, the lily lies—
Here, all's brave as the red, red rose !

What soft accents of ecstasy
At the sweet o' the day when the wan light dies
Shall sing of my maid's white grace to me ?
Joy in my heart, as the soft stars rise,
Rises clear, and my night defies,
For the warm dear arms mine eyes enclose,
And dewy kisses my brow surprise—
Here all's brave as the red, red rose !

ENVOI

Here sleeps treasure no ransom buys,
Fair as in Eden my garden grows
Full blooms, blossoms of tender size,
Here all's brave as the red, red rose.

VI

BALLADE OF HIS FIDELITY TO POESY

Cries every braggart, swollen with empty air :—
"I crave my fill of love and wine and meat!
Mine be the million, mine the lion's share!
Wine warms, and gold is good, and time is fleet;
Then ere the night-fall let me drink and eat!"
Dead are the gods, and dead is joy divine,
Art fades apace: the fairest of the Nine
Flies, bare of breast, beneath the tempest dread;
And, sweet, my heart is sore with dule and tyne;
I love the laurel, else my soul were dead.

Queen Memory's daughter, Muse beyond compare,
Now yield me meed of music blithe and sweet!
—Nay, hawk thy prose for deniers at the fair!
—'Tis Troy I fain would sing in measure meet!
—Go, get thee glory in the scriveners' seat!
Bare are the heights where grew the magic vine,
Nor strays the huntress of the flashing eyne
By greenwood glades whereo'er her harrier sped—
My lyre is strung for hatred's frenzy fine!
I love the laurel, else my soul were dead!

And Galatea, in her beauty bare,
Cries to Pygmalion suppliant at her feet:
Wouldst have me love thy beard, thy touzled hair?
Nay, in what haven rides thy treasure-fleet?
Love's hest is cruel as the law of Crete!
Sirrah, hast gold? for thee the kind eyes shine;
Hast store of treasure? Lo, her love is thine,
Thine is her faith: thy pleading naught can stead;
The very milk we draw is salt as brine!
I love the laurel, else my soul were dead!

ENVOI

Thou iron age, till Hate thy doom shall sign
Must maiden Poesy in thy dungeon pine,
But I—I scorn thee, for my soul is wed
With Hellas, and her craft of song is mine!
I love the laurel, else my soul were dead!

VII

BALLADE OF THE LILY

Shy woodland muse, maid of the brow of gold,
Now grant me grace the Lily's praise to sing,
The Lily, lord of splendours manifold,
For when he flowers, Nature to life doth spring,
Hails him her liege, and craves his counselling.
For not the shell that is Aurora's bed,
Nor foam that flecks the tower sea-buffeted,
Nor the white hazel that white maidens bless,
Nor sunlit pear-bloom, blushing rosy red,
Not these may match a Lily's loveliness.

At night, beside the fountain pure and cold
Low droops the Lily, touched with slumber's wing,
'Neath starlit skies, with ocean round him rolled,

E'en as in Asian lands some dreaming king
Beneath his purple's brave o'er-shadowing.
Yet not the snow on Ural's soaring head,
Nor blushing silks on fairest bosom spread,
Nor Tyre's, nor Egypt's halls of high liesse,
Nor lotus bloom on drowsy river shed,
Not these may match a Lily's loveliness.

Fair even as thou, bright warrior maid of old,
To whose white foot the amorous sand did cling,
The radiant Lily, blithe and gallant-souled,
Dawns on the world at dawn's awakening,
Glittering and glorious, Nature's lordliest thing.
Nor pearl agleam in wastes that life hath fled,
Nor urn by maiden hands engarlanded,
Nor marble wrought by passion limitless,
Nor gleaming nymph, bride of the centaur dread,
Not these may match a Lily's loveliness.

ENVOI

Lily, with thee my soul is knit and wed,
For neither slumbering swan, nor goodlihed
Of silver night, nor Naiad's shimmering tress,
Nor muse's feet in twinkling measure sped,
Not these may match a Lily's loveliness.

VIII

BALLADE OF ROSE

Rose is all mirth and takes her fling,
And I, who love her sparkling eye,
Long, 'neath her laughter's buffeting
To catch and kiss her till she cry.
She dresses, railing ay and ay,
She laughs : her eyes my kisses court :
She starts, and now she's fain to fly,
—Sure ne'er was seen such merry sport !

She's off, and swift in chase I spring ;
But sure my truant's wondrous shy !
Yet now I hold the fairy thing,
—But no, for there, she's free, and—fie,
She's found her confits ! and poor I
E'en though with tongues I should exhort,
Am foiled : and so the day slips by :
Sure ne'er was seen such merry sport !

And when I seek her pride to sting
Her dimpling looks my wit defy :

—But now I tire of skirmishing,
And lips to shrinking lips apply :
—I leave her cross, and all awry. . . .
She weeps—'tis Beauty's sure resort :
—Her fiery cheek on mine doth lie !
Sure ne'er was seen such merry sport !

ENVOI

Her tears with kisses hot I dry,
I kiss each straying tress I sort,
—And now she laughs, the wanton sly !
Sure ne'er was seen such merry sport !

IX

BALLADE OF HIS GOSSIP

Did ever christening brave with this compare?
For while the throng my gossip's beauty sing,
Men roast whole oxen, right Homeric fare,
And wide the gates their double portals fling.
Fair Alizon! Time flits on lightning wing,
Yet still thy beauty gladdens all my soul:
Thy dancing eyes, that glow like devil's coal,
Thy breast of roses and of lilies clear,
Thy childish airs that cunningly cajole:
Now God guard Alizon, my gossip dear!

Ay, then I chewed the bitter cud of care
Here in my land of lake and heath and ling:
And followed visions vain as empty air,
—But she was fair as dawn's awakening!

And now about her prime fresh glories cling :
Her golden hair that haply breaks control,
Falls to her waist in rippling roll on roll :
Heavy it hangs and fair, nor hath its peer
E'en in the Fleece he of Iolchos stole :
Now God guard Alizon, my gossip dear !

Ah, swiftly fled that childhood rapt and rare !
My maid, whose locks ran riot, ring on ring,
Now watches musing, with her matron's air,
Her urchins, strong as Titans wantoning,
That in the meadow take their joy of Spring.
She plies her tasks on yonder grassy knoll,
Nor sits she mute in sullen teen and dole,
More than the bird that cries the Spring good cheer,
But many a blithe and dulcet note doth troll :
Now God guard Alizon, my gossip dear !

ENVOI

A word will ruffle her, a word console,
Her lips are brave as cherries ripe and whole :
I loved her madly through the sweet o' the year,
She takes my kiss with dainty looks and droll !
Now God guard Alizon, my gossip dear !

X

BALLADE IN PRAISE OF MAIDENS

Since Paris now to puppets bows the knee,
And loves a cheek all rouge, and powdery pale,
And takes her toll, with eager eyes of glee,
Of crimson lips that flaunt their charm for sale,
I turn my rein, and tell a lovelier tale.
—Come, Cupid, sing with me, thou devil's thrall,
The golden shoot that to thy scythe shall fall,
Come, for we follow down the misty glade
The nymphs whose ways with mirth are musical:
—A health, a health, to every dainty maid!

I love not eyes that owe their witchery
To hireling craft, I love not graces stale

Nor brows embraved with wanton artistry,
Before such pomps my coward senses quail!
—I'm for the woodland, let the witlings rail!
What joy to mock at dullard duty's call,
To plead apace beneath the leafy pall
Till rosy lips no longer may upbraid,
But learn of Love his perfect madrigal!
—A health, a health, to every dainty maid!

Free are their hearts, their careless souls are free,
Calm are their brows, where peace doth still prevail,
Brave are their charms as lily of the lea,
Or rose within some pleasaunce of the vale:
Their radiant arms are chill as winter's hail.
—Yet be they snow or lilies virginal,
Deep in their tresses' fairy skein withal
Amid the glitter of the golden braid
Dwelleth Desire, the wizard mystical!
—A health, a health, to every dainty maid!

ENVOI

Then yield we to their grace, ere worse befall
—Their eyes are lit with subtle flames and small

By Venus, that her darlings ay doth
aid :
The bowl's aflame ! Hey for the festival !
—A health, a health, to every dainty
maid !

XI

BALLADE IN FAVOUR OF POESY THAT HAD FALLEN INTO DISDAIN

Thou who couldst sway the sword and lyre
 And in thy dream, as in the fight,
Wast ever clad in flame of fire,
 And on thine anvil song couldst smite
 That thrilled the morning waves with light,
Whose fiery soul for vengeance prayed
 In strains that smote Olympus' height—
Where art thou, great Alcaeus' shade?

Return again and slay, nor tire.
 We crave thy slogan voice of might
That filled the strand with echoes dire.
 The muse, aghast with many a slight,
 To desert drear hath ta'en her flight:
—Rent is the lyre her spirit swayed,
 The lyre whereby thy days were bright!
Where art thou, great Alcaeus' shade?

Thy laurel boughs their sap expire,
The iron to their soul doth bite.
—Then haste thee, haste, our god and sire,
And heal thy children with thy sight!
And shelter him, the lonely wight,
Whom Thought her martyr rapt hath made,
Smitten with winter black as night—
Where art thou, great Alcaeus' shade?

ENVOI

With powers of dawn and darkness dight,
Come thou in wrath my war to aid,
E'en though thy flame consume me quite—
Where art thou, great Alcaeus' shade?

XII

BALLADE OF THE ISLE OF VENUS

Her garden harried by the ruffian wind,
Cythera lies, lorn of her lovely state,
Her beauty to a barren reef declined
Her glory gone, her pleasaunce desolate
Lashed by the sun with flame inveterate ;
Yet seek we, friends, across the fairy main,
The land whose love in all our hearts doth reign,
The land whose utter beauty shall beguile
All them that win her of their care and pain—
Up sail, and over to the Magic Isle !

Death on the deep our laughing crew shall find,
Nor storm nor wrack shall from our path abate,
The surge shall buffet us, the lightning blind,
The tempest whelm us in its roaring hate :

What reck we ? Fairy shores our coming wait !
For all the jealous sea our joy we'll gain,
Like prisoned birds whose flight is skyward ta'en
We'll fly the land of fog and vapour vile—
Ye brooding hearts, that still of peace are fain,
Up sail, and over to the Magic Isle !

The grey cerastes now his coils doth wind
Upon the threshold, erst inviolate,
Whence Cypris shone with splendid eyes and kind :
Yet o'er us Love, with many a rosy mate,
Trills us the silver carol of our fate.
Ye heroes, strong in weakness, gods i' the grain
Joy, joy be yours, as at the oar ye strain
On to the land where still the Rose doth smile,
And the lone pantheress weeps her love in vain !
Up sail, and over to the Magic Isle !

ENVOI

The blue shall glut our hungry eyes again,
The comrade breeze our eager wing sustain,
No touch of earth our plumes may now defile :
—Hey for the gods of old, the olden fane !
Up sail, and over to the Magic Isle !

XIII

BALLADE OF THE FAIR MAID OF THE INN

FRIEND, leave me here : love follows in your train
With many a sweet your Lady's bower to bless,
The night will bring you in its round again
Flagons of Rhenish, feasting, high liesse,
And masques and song and love-in-idleness.
Be mine the lot to wander far and free
To gay Montrouge, and yonder hostelry
Where joy and sunshine still their guest acclaim,
And Margot's eyes are lit with love of me !
Here's to the lass whose kirtle's red as flame !

What guerdon hath one yonder, if he gain
The favour of some fair one in distress ?
A stealthy kiss in silence given and ta'en,
Ay, e'en at need a breath of love's caress.

—But here, I worship Margot's lightest
tress !
I love her laughing eyes, I love, perdie,
The dainty rosebuds, full and brave to see
That o'er the breast-knots blush for joy and
shame,
—And ah, her hair that is my ecstasy !
Here's to the lass whose kirtle's red as flame !

And oft I've climbed into her bower amain
By the old wall that's vexed with storm
and stress,
And here to linger on my heart is fain
Where nothing comes to cloud the joyful-
ness
Or mar the magic of my sorceress.
Satins and snows, the lily of the lea,
Are duller than the radiant argentry
Of the soft breasts that all my being claim—
She's made for wine and mirth and songs
of glee !
Here's to the lass whose kirtle's red as flame !

ENVOI

Thus either wight is blest in his degree ;
You to the Dame that hath your heart in fee,
I to my inn, and frolic Cupid's game,
To wine and song and light-lipped revelry—
Here's to the lass whose kirtle's red as
flame !

XIV

BALLADE OF A LADY WITH GOLDEN HAIR

The queen of love, thou lovely maid
Had erst thy grace and joy serene,
The lips whose parted light and shade
Compel me like a magnet keen—
Ay, Venus' self hath dowered my queen
With all her wealth of worth untold,
Eyes of the diamond's wondrous sheen,
Lashes of jet and hair of gold.

There lingers in thy tresses stayed
The everlasting cantilene
Of ripples that the rocks upbraid :
Here all is miracle, I ween ;
Thy beauty but the fairy screen
Thy fairy soul from scathe to hold—
Snows, roses, joyance evergreen,
Lashes of jet and hair of gold.

Ay, here are joys that ne'er shall fade,
 Cheeks rosy with the flush of e'en,
Breasts as the lily's self arrayed,
 Hair radiant as the morning's mien :
 Deep eyes, wherein mine eyes have seen
Heaven's spaces infinite unfold,
 With elvish stars that dance between—
Lashes of jet and hair of gold.

ENVOI

A truce, a truce to care and teen !
 My song, with joyous flight and bold,
Fares forth, to find in Love's demesne
 Lashes of jet and hair of gold.

XV

BALLADE OF THREE SISTERS

The three are sisters : each hath sunny hair
Yet May's is touched with gold, Lucy's with fire,
Jean's brow is proud, and hath some look of care,
Lucy's sweet eyes are clear of scorn and ire :
Stretched on the sward we croon, a lazy choir,
Or chatter, truants deaf to every call :
Tale follows sprightly tale, and soon the ball
Is flung to me, and, lo, the task is mine
To make for each a merry madrigal :
And Phoebe's there, to fill our cup with wine.

Lucy and Jean my musing fancy share,
Till, lo, the light, smitten with swift desire,

Hath kissed the brow of May: and wondrous fair
She shows: for Love hath shot his arrows dire
And now seeks aid that nought may tame or tire
In those deep eyes, aflame and mystical:
And Lucy sighs, and hath me straight in thrall,
And bids me tell some story brave and fine,
The sunlight laughs along the old brown wall,
And Phoebe's there, to fill our cup with wine.

I worship May with love beyond compare,
Yet Lucy's sweet: and though my kiss inspire
Fair Jenny's wrath, I love her too, I swear,
And feel her hurt, and when she weeps, admire
The darling flush which is her scorn's attire.
Then as I toy with Maisie's fingers small
I murmur soft, "Child, wouldst thou give me all —"
She starts, and bids me follow Fame divine:
Jean plucks a peach that mellows to its fall,
And Phoebe's there, to fill our cup with wine.

ENVOI

Prince, wouldst thou seek this garden magical,
And view its radiant treasure, swift would pall
The rarest gem for which thy heart may pine,
The fairest sight thy musing eyes recall:
And Phoebe's there, to fill thy cup with wine.

XVI

BALLADE OF THE MYSTIC DENIZENS OF THE FOREST

Blithe as of yore, the mocking fairy sings
And wantons 'neath the holly's crimson pride
That antic Zephyr frets with fleeting wings:
And Dian, dread of wolves malignant-eyed,
Deep in the dells her broken heart doth hide:
Her cult lives on in many a rustic fane
And when the moon begins her tender reign,
And every copse is bathed in silver rays,
Then doth the Maiden seek her dim domain—
'Tis night, and Dian roams the woodland ways.

Their tresses twined with fairy chapletings,
The dim white sylph and frolic kelpie glide
In morris gay athwart the fairy rings,
And the red dwarf, his hair in elflocks tied,
Sports with the nixy wan, his lissom bride.

And 'neath the moon a flitting form is plain
And by the river's edge are heard again
Shy footsteps under which the ivy sways,
A muffled groan, a sigh, a sob of pain—
'Tis night, and Dian roams the woodland ways.

Before her might, as home her spoil she brings,
Flies the lone stag, and from his stricken side
Sobs out his life in broken whimperings :
Chill blows the wind across the moorland wide ;
Her harriers scarce her hest imperious bide,
And chiding at the leash, intently strain :
The warrior nymph her golden bow hath ta'en
And in the string the magic arrow lays,
Loose are her locks to kiss of wind and rain—
'Tis night, and Dian roams the woodland ways.

ENVOI

Prince, fly with me the forest wild and vain
Of mart and street, the dusty ways of gain ;
—Here in the dell, beneath the myrtle sprays,
The City lies for which our hearts are fain !
—'Tis night, and Dian roams the woodland ways.

XVII

A BALLADE TO HERALD IN THE SPRING

The soft wind sighs across the leas,
To music of the tinkling rills,
And Spring, her wayward will to please,
By fairy dales and glowing hills,
Her wondrous handiwork fulfils.
The brook sings on beneath the blue ;
All in the meadow throbs and thrills,
Even as doves that bill and coo.

Adown the laughing glade the trees
Whose being grace and joy distils
Fling careless tresses to the breeze :
The feathered chorus pipes and trills :
Sure, 'tis the hour when Heaven wills
That all her children sing and woo,
Forgetting each his hates and ills,
Even as doves that bill and coo.

The underworld is full of bees :
A trance the breathless woodland stills ;

The nymph ungirdled strays at ease :
 Each floweret spreads its fairy frills ;
 The crooning sylph with passion fills
The meadow, brave with many a hue,
 And all are quit of care that kills,
Even as doves that bill and coo.

ENVOI

High on the tower the ringdove bills
 And wantons with her lover true :
—Then take your joy, ye Jacks and Jills,
 Even as doves that bill and coo !

XVIII

BALLADE OF THE SEA

(Written on leaving Havre-de-Grace)

Farewell, thou laughing town that art Joy's grave!
For now the cry's, up sail, and yo heave ho!
So live thou, scorning Want, thy haggard slave
That bleeds upon her pallet mean and low
With meagre breasts that through their tatters show.
Ay, revel, wanton, in thy hate and greed!
I follow where my fairy fancies lead!
For, wooed of all the winds, the sail flies free
To waft me outward to my spirit's meed,
The sea with all its surging waves, the sea!

Farewell, thou dungeon foul where maniacs rave!
Farewell, ye Shylocks, carrion as the crow!
Soft sings the music of the lilting wave,
And, lo, the hunter of the golden bow

Thrills with his shafts of light the waves below.
The sea in royal might, a queen indeed,
Draws me with laughing eyes that subtly plead
Her lightest breath hath joy and health in fee
And lonely peace, and slumber good at need,
The sea with all its surging waves, the sea!

Soft on the sea-wind steals the music brave.
—Thou jaded rake in frill and furbelow
Whose heart's desire is still to scrape and save,
Paris, farewell! keep all thy Mirabeaux
All thy Ferraris, all thy Juliette Beaux:
Take joy of summer, clear of care and heed.
—I seek the helper fierce by fate decreed
Whose breath thrills all my eager flesh with glee
The mighty sea, wild-voiced and many-keyed,
The sea with all its surging waves, the sea!

ENVOI

Here's cure, my heart, for all thy wounds that bleed!
With all its tresses green the wandering weed
Lashes the reef: the shadows break and flee:
Vast lies the plain whereo'er the breakers speed,
The sea with all its surging waves, the sea!

XIX

BALLADE OF A FAIR AMAZON

(In Marble)

Once in the age of wonder and delight
A sculptor rare within this castle hold
Wrought thee, thou peerless maid of beauty white,
In memory of the godlike Greeks of old.
Now that the sun, wooing thy splendour cold,
Thy paleness with his glowing flame enspheres,
Loose thou the locks that kiss thy dainty ears,
Stand forth in all thy loveliness confest,
And 'neath the amorous wind that shifts and veers
Smile, maid-at-arms, and bare thy lovely breast!

Thy youthful limbs in all their glory dight,
Thine eyes of dread, that witch whoe'er behold,
Shall wake to song, with magic of their might,
The mocking jay, the throstle blithe and bold,
And every songster that the copses hold.
Who see thee, sudden lose their weight of years :
Then by this margin of the fairy mere's
Where water sleeps by willow shade carest
Show the white wonder that our darkness cheers,
Smile, maid-at-arms, and bare thy lovely breast !

Unveil, then, maiden, to our craving sight,
Beneath this April sky of glowing gold,
Thy naked limbs, whose beauty pure and bright
Shall salve our sins and sorrows manifold.
What though the springtide quicken mead and wold ?
Our sickly age is full of groans and tears,
No kindly leech its cry for healing hears,
The spectre Grief doth still our ways infest,
Then heal the ill that all our manhood seres !
Smile, maid-at-arms, and bare thy lovely breast !

ENVOI

Queen, as the flashing sun his setting nears
Bare thou the breast that tamed the Trojan spears,
Away with gloom, our sickly age's pest!
Joy is the only god the heart reveres!
Smile, maid-at-arms, and bare thy lovely breast!

XX

DOUBLE BALLADE OF GOOD FOLK

THE sorry day in which I sing
 Is chill to spirits brave and free,
But apt for crafty trafficking :
 For all of Jacob's pedigree
 The scurvy sons of usury
Now wax apace, while round them rolls
 The golden wealth of Arabie—
Now God be kind to all good souls !

No longer, Muse, thy following
 May stray by fairy lawn and lea,
For now's the day of trust and ring,
 And Fate is deaf to every plea
 Save that of rogue and Jew, perdie !
And hearts are distant as the poles,
 And hate is deeper than the sea—
Now God be kind to all good souls !

And slighted song hath taken wing,
 For all her sons have bent the knee
To forms of vile imagining,
 And each his lonely weird must dree :

And critics swarm malignantly
From Envy's dens and noisome holes :
And all from Tartuffe take the key—
Now God be kind to all good souls !

And Nemo takes his spiteful fling,
And Judas sells his God with glee
For all the pence his pen may bring :
And, Orpheus, in thy signory
A fool to grosser fools than he
His chill morality extols,
And hourly nails thee to thy tree—
Now God be kind to all good souls !

But thou the strength to whom I cling,
Genius, the lord and life of me,
Still, still thy grace is quickening,
And lo ! our Prince of Poesie
Hath sung the brighter day to be,
And Joy her lilting carol trolls,
And Love, thy sons are fain of thee !
Now God be kind to all good souls !

Then, Thought that art our only king,
And Art, that hast delight in fee,
Wake with the dawn's awakening,
For all the sons of darkness flee :
And Fancy, fairest form to see,
With Venus trips the rosy knolls
And all the brood of Faerie !
Now God be kind to all good souls !

XXI

BALLADE OF WOMEN

My friend, from China to Peru,
And where the Baltic breezes blow,
There's many a dainty Kate and Prue,
Full worth thy wandering to and fro :
And Buda hath, like Bergamo,
Her nymphs whose glance enchantment carries
But *woman*—would you call her *so*—
Woman, my friend, is ware of Paris !

We of her flock are tried and true.
With rose and frill and flounce and bow,
She's passing dainty to the view :
To slander her is woe on woe :
For like the poster of a show
She lies ; and ne'er her tongue miscarries
Once it is set against a foe,
—Woman, my friend, is ware of Paris !

The dress she wears hath fairy hue,
The fare she craves is light as snow,

The lore she reads is strange and new,
 The plays she loves with passion glow!
 She for whom lofty Troy lay low
Loved fewer than mylady marries,
 For plainly would I have you know
Woman, my friend, is ware of Paris!

ENVOI

Fair Sir, from this I may not go—
 Behind the worth of woman tarries
The utmost praise of man: but, oh,
 Woman, my friend, is ware of Paris!

XXII

DOUBLE BALLADE OF THE FOLLIES OF PARIS

Oh life, is it life or a wild mare's nest
When Paris her loves and crafts doth ply,
Where the penny-a-liner's among the best,
And the town's the slave of a wanton sly
That shows but a glimpse, as she passes by,
Of locks that are ruddy in every ring
As the good red gold her touch makes fly—
Oh, it moves my mirth in the merry Spring!

And single speech is a theme of jest:
Babel's here, with the tongues that lie,
And it's hey! for sin, for her fruit hath zest,
And it's down with the Code, and the powers on high;
And the springs of song are long run dry,
And if Pindar his godlike strain should sing,
His fare in Paris were humble pie—
Oh, it moves my mirth in the merry Spring!

Here, in the moil of the Court's unrest,
Honour's a flag of gaudy dye
That the pleader flaunts, if his cause unblest
Might get him grace in the judge's eye :
But the pleader may bellow or laugh or cry
May conjure the stars or his hands may wring
For the judge sleeps sound as a pig in his stye !
Oh, it moves my mirth in the merry Spring !

The trull with the maiden's eyes and breast
To whom our men of the millions hie
Bows their will to her lightest hest
Then flings them the love—that their gold can buy !
For her goes many a life awry :
But for every token her hands may fling
Lovers in legion sue and vie,
—Oh, it moves my mirth in the merry Spring !

And life is a black and perilous quest
Where each man goes with his sword at thigh,
And Cunning in every heart is guest,
And Love's bright beacon none may spy :
And Guile to Scorn makes glib reply,
And Folly is fee'd for her counselling,
And we flatter the lord that our hearts deny,
Oh, it moves my mirth in the merry Spring !

Gay as a puppet in fairings drest,
 Brave in the pomp her sins supply,
Paris the wanton, by wealth carest,
 Revels and struts in her bravery :
 Yet jeers at the Indian strange and shy
That the Western barque to her Seine doth
 bring :
 —Well the shrew may scold and the saint
 may sigh,
Oh, it moves my mirth in the merry Spring !

XXIII

BALLADE OF GOOD COUNSEL

(To his friend Georges Rochegrosse, the artist)

Since Folly now is all the rage,
 Right happy he that hath no share
In suffering fools of every age
 Whose wit no garment hath to wear
 But one whose every thread is bare !
Now may the Devil crush them flat !
 But since I've tutored you with care,
Now, George, my friend, remember that !

If thou wouldst live as lives the sage,
 Soon as time makes thee manhood's heir,
Let ne'er a fool thy wits engage,
 Nor Orson of the touzled hair,
 Nor Fopling with his feckless air,
For each on favours waxes fat
 That simple artists ill can spare ;
Now, George, my friend, remember that !

When wenches gallant warfare wage,
And proffer each her wanton ware,
With flower at breast for Cupid's gage,
Fly, fly, the challenge of the fair!
For Love to arm the eyes of her
Hath many a smithy brisk, whereat
He forges subtle shafts and rare:
—Now, George, my friend, remember that!

ENVOI

Nay, to the forest free repair,
With finch or linnet hold thy chat,
Or fly to Learning in her lair;
Now, George, my friend, remember that!

XXIV

BALLADE OF HIS WIFE

A Lady of Lorraine

My dearest love, 'twas nigh to Domremi
That thou wast nurtured in the woodland fair,
Whence come thy constancy and spirit free,
For thou hast trod the lanes, O huswife rare,
That saw the Shepherd Maid beyond compare!
E'en as at toil thou still didst ne'er deplore
Thy bitter ploys and tribulation sore,
So in the home, queen of thy dear domain
Thou shinest, and dost bear thee more and more
With gallant heart, my Lady of Lorraine!

While languid maids on every hand we see
That hoard their beauty wan that ill doth wear

Trailing a mincing gait with laggard knee
Laundry and bakery are all thy care !
Thy hand is strong as steel and light as air.
And thou of fair preserves hast homely store,
Spotless thy napery, spotless every floor
As 'twere thy mother's handiwork again :
'Tis Life thou lov'st ; her lies thou dost abhor
With gallant heart, my Lady of Lorraine !

Then for the pain than often vexeth me,
It flies apace, and is but Fancy's snare,
Thanks to the healing breath and touch of thee,
A bird of fleeting wing that thou dost scare,
A sojourner his host can gaily spare !
True leech, thou wottest naught of fruitless lore,
Healing by grace, which is thy being's core,
For thou dost take me in thine arms amain,
And crown my brow with kisses o'er and o'er
With gallant heart, my Lady of Lorraine !

ENVOI

Bright soul, whereby my soul from earth
doth soar!
Though Fate before our feet her jewels pour,
As pearls that sunder from a severed chain,
We still shall love, even as we loved before,
With gallant heart, my Lady of Lorraine!

XXV

BALLADE OF THE FAIR MAID OF THE VALLEY

See her, this buxom daughter of the Vire,
That well might bear the sacks that feed her mill,
Whose silver laughter gladdens every ear
And all the Vale of Basselin doth fill:
Her glance is gay, yet in her eyes is will.
Plain is her brow, yet o'er it frankness plays;
No cruel busk her swelling bosom stays:
Wooed of the winds, joyous in sun and shower,
Clear as the lark, she trills her silver lays:
And ah, her lip, Love's splendid sanguine flower!

This lovely lass, that knows nor care nor fear,
Across the meads of May doth frisk and trill

And wanders, free and joyous, far and near,
Ay, and at need can drain with Jack and Jill
Her foaming cup, nor e'er her cider spill.
Ne'er in the manor that her hest obeys
Did silver shine, or splendid lacquer blaze,
Yet glorious teeth are hers, love's perfect dower,
White as the flocks that o'er her meadow graze—
And ah, her lip, Love's splendid sanguine flower!

Clear is her brow, her radiant spirit clear
Of care and envy and each modern ill,
To every mountain tarn her face is dear,
Her feet are kissed by every purling rill.
Then as the sun sinks 'neath the Western hill,
She hies her home along the fragrant ways,
Gallant and free, her fluttering kirtle strays
Adown her lovely thigh, as in the hour
Of peace and joy she sings her song of praise:
And ah, her lip, Love's splendid sanguine flower!

ENVOI

'Tis love that still her lovely spirit sways:
—Dominie, sudden on his bench at gaze,

Cries, as his aged eyes the lass devour :—
"'Tis Helen come to light our cloudy days!"
And ah, her lip, Love's splendid sanguine flower!

XXVI

BALLADE OF HIMSELF

Banville, thou marshaller of rhymes,
'Tis sweet to hear the roundelay
That finches hold in Chaville limes—
And wouldst thou to the Turcarets
To ease them of their golden prey?
Sure, 'tis a dream and thou dost know it!
'Twere well for other folk: but, nay,
Certes, I am a lyric poet!

I still can witch the town at times
With tender tunes of old Segrais:
But business blackens and begrimes
And poets ill may serve for pay!
I'd love, if I could see my way,
The Western Land, and all we owe it.
But wherefore now cry woe the day?
Certes, I am a lyric poet!

My spirit ill with cities chimes,
And soon my soul were very clay,

But far from commerce and her crimes
I get me to the greenwood gay !
As bird amid the swamp astray
When cloud and storm no kindness show it
Hies to its home beneath the spray :
Certes, I am a lyric poet !

ENVOI

Prince, song is all my work and play :
Phoebus on me did erst bestow it,
God of the bow, to whom I pray.
Certes, I am a lyric poet !

XXVII

BALLADE OF LOVE, THE GOOD CRAFTSMAN

The world is thronged with sons of craft and care,
With artists true and men of forge and mine,
Moulders of brass or metals frail and rare,
Wielding or adze or chisel keen and fine,
Striving in steel or jewel-work divine:
And others, jinglers, mimes, a crazy crew,
Yet wise in craft of words nor ill nor few,
And dwelling ay with Fancy hand in glove:
Yet wheresoe'er he dwell, whate'er he do,
The rarest craftsman of them all is Love.

He sets young Zephyr straying in the hair
Of maids that in the mead their posies twine:
He decks Aglaia forth in idylls fair,
He labours late with peasants in the vine,

He curbs the Arab of the flashing eyne :
He joins the wanton dance or weareth rue,
He makes the prince in beggar's garb to sue,
Or sets the lowly serf his lord above :
He freezes fire and makes it fire anew—
The rarest craftsman of them all is Love.

He broiders robes that splendid wantons wear,
And weaves the scarlet woot of rare design,
Or fashions clay with fingers light as air :
He showers largesse, or sore in need doth pine,
Sombre as death, or brisk as sparkling wine :
Angler, he takes all fish that swim the blue,
Archer, he strikes with arrow keen and true
Buzzard and linnet, lark and hawk and dove :
He sings, and nymphs his path with roses strew—
The rarest craftsman of them all is Love.

ENVOI

Ay, Prince, he's all, Tartuffe and Lovelace too :

He'll play in any part at any cue,
He's prest to wield the pen or fling the glove,
He shows in every shape and every hue—
The rarest craftsman of them all is Love.

XXVIII

BALLADE OF THE NIGHTINGALE

Two lonely lovers, young and lovely, stray
 Beneath the hawthorn by the river's flow,
He blithe and gallant as a summer's day,
 She, lingering still with pensive step and slow,
 Albeit her eyes with tender radiance glow.
 The magic time of song and passion nears,
 Beside his lady, that with rapture hears,
His song up-soaring from the listening vale,
 Hark! To the stars he loves, his radiant peers,
Deep in the forest sings the nightingale.

Swift spells of love her maiden spirit sway,
 Her lovely body thrills in passion's throe,
She quivers as the hawthorn's dancing spray
 Upon her eyes joy and enchantment grow.
 Her fairy hand, whiter than purest snow,
 An instant on the moonlit sward appears,
 And o'er the beck there streameth on her ears

The shower of liquid song that fills the vale
With fire and anguish of the vanished years—
Deep in the forest sings the nightingale.

They whisper soft : the furtive airs at play
Pass on their brows divinely to and fro :
She swoons for joy and fear : and 'neath the may
Where slow and still the drowsy waters go
Fast in her lover's arms she lieth low.
Flecked with the sheen that through the coppice peers
And wooed of every wind that shifts and veers,
Shaken, exultant, in the moonlight pale,
His neck a-glitter with the evening's tears,
Deep in the forest sings the nightingale.

ENVOI

His burst of passionate grief the bird uprears ;
Then, mazed with all the magic of the spheres,
He stays his song, and swift from heaven doth fail
The glory that the soul of Love reveres :
Deep in the forest sings the nightingale.

XXIX

BALLADE OF VICTOR HUGO, FATHER OF ALL RHYMERS

E'EN at this pass, victorious rhyme
Hath captives to her bow and spear,
For eager bards of every clime
In all our hostels crave their cheer :
From Voyron, labour's murky sphere,
From Gap and Lille, in countless file,
From Auch and Nuits they hie them here :
—The Father's yonder, in the Isle !

And some against the mount sublime
Raise dizzy ladder-work, and sheer
Toward the double summit climb ;
And others crow like chanticleer
In many a quavering note and queer ;
And others join, in suaver style,
Our Abbé with his Vergil dear :
—The Father's yonder, in the Isle !

And some ring bells of dainty chime :
 And others foolish foreheads rear,
And clash in frenzied tune and time
 Like any ram or maddened steer :
 And from the South there smites the ear
The strain that snapped our fetters vile,
 And struck the gaoler pale with fear !
—The Father's yonder, in the Isle !

ENVOI

Leconte de Lisle hath ne'er his peer
 In craft of gold, and Gautier's file
Hath carven many a jewel clear :
 —The Father's yonder, in the Isle !

XXX

BALLADE IN PRAISE OF RABELAIS

(Ballade de la Sainte Buverie)

How stands the cup? Drink on, ye topers free:
He of Touraine, the poet true and high,
Master François, our prince of mirth and glee
Who gave us wine more rare than gold could buy,
And ruled our earth in jovial majesty,
Now, like the wine-god, mounts his flowing press,
Crushing the ruddy grape whose name we bless,
And brims a beaker with the juice divine,
'Dost thirst? Then drink long life and happiness—
'Tis Rabelais' hand that fills our cup with wine.

Ay, drink we all, master and serf, perdie !
And soldier, blithe and bold when bullets fly,
And scurvy Jew, that hast our goods in fee,
And huckster, be thou brisk thy wares to cry,
And rhymer, thou thy rarest tropes to try.
And thou, poor peasant, bowed with toil and stress,
Bring smoking hams and spread the savoury mess,
And call the axeman from the stricken pine
To join our scene of song and fair liesse :
'Tis Rabelais' hand that fills our cup with wine.

Then haste, ye toilers all of each degree,
Ye that with plough or plane your labour ply,
Or grate on scrannel pipe in sorry key ;
Whether in hall or field your cunning lie,
Yet be ye partners in our revelry.
Or art thou in thy cruel life's duress
More parched with drouth than in the wilderness
A sandy hollow at the sun's decline ?
Thy thirst is gone e'er thou thy thirst confess !
—'Tis Rabelais' hand that fills our cup with wine !

ENVOI

And thou, my France, hast gotten rare largesse,
A draught divine to heal thy sore distress ;
For he that knew thy thirst hath given the vine
That turns thy dearth to joy and loveliness.
'Tis Rabelais' hand that fills our cup with wine.

XXXI

BALLADE OF HIS MOTHER

MADAME ÉLIZABETH ZÉLIE DE BANVILLE

THINK not, dear, that I, thy son, who love the lyre
E'er may fail in spirit therefrom nor fall away ;
E'en at pass of winter tyrannous and dire
Still my brows are radiant with the deathless bay.
Son and thrall to Phoebus, born to love the lay,
Here where hies the shepherdess, tripping down the mead,
Yonder where the brooklet's singing ripples speed
Dainty with her distaff—lit with Fancy's wine
Once I stole the music that thrills the sighing reed !
Ay, and this thou knowest, mother and nurse o' mine !

Save the royal laurels to which my brows aspire
Naught below may vex me with envy nor dismay,
For to follow beauty was erst my heart's desire
And sing in many a measure my golden songs and gay.
Oft when wanton Fancy hath swept me far astray
Rapt with joy and glory, athwart her fiery steed,
Many a tender morsel of flesh I left to bleed
Riven by the rock-points: and many a bloody sign
Scored my brow with anguish, yet I gave no heed—
Ay, and this thou knowest, mother and nurse o' mine!

Of this world of wonder I hold me lord and sire,
For all to pleasure Fancy, and grace her wayward play,
Rubies rare I treasure and love their kingly fire
Proud as gloating miser, or Khan of far Cathay.
Sure the witch Vainglory hath marked me for her prey!

E'en as cunning goldsmith gets him glorious meed
With file and crafty chisel and hammer good at need
So I tame the song-gold beneath my hand divine
Blessing thee, the fairy that at my birth didst plead !
—Ay, and this thou knowest, mother and nurse o' mine !

ENVOI

So my days are careless, and clear of want and greed
No braggart I, nor lordling, nor of the lacquey breed ;
But sworn to Lady Poesy, of whom I ne'er repine
And free as any songbird my wayward life to lead,
—Ay, and this thou knowest, mother and nurse o' mine !

XXXII

BALLADE IN PRAISE OF THE ROSE

AGAIN my song with joyous flight and bold
Would sing the fair flower of the bleeding breast
That breathes of love and loveliness untold
Like some fair mouth that fiery lips have prest:
Whose glorious crimson sings in language blest
Its everlasting song of joy and pain:
—Ay, on this morn when Flora comes again
I sing the chalice rare whose leaves enclose
Strange scents of passion that make mad the brain—
Above all flowers my spirit loves the Rose.

Now doth the Rose her glorious heart unfold.
In woodland ways where Spring is loveliest
Thyself didst dye her petals white and cold

In thine own blood, Queen of the rosy West!
A pallid slave, the violet waits her hest.
The lily's self that knows nor sin nor stain,
Yearns for her crimson glory, and is fain
To own her Queen of every flower that blows:
Only the radiant Star may share her reign—
Above all flowers my spirit loves the Rose.

His brow o'ercast with sorrows manifold
The monarch marks not, in his soul's unrest,
The gallant rose, a glory to behold,
That decks the brow of her he loveth best
His young Infanta, all in radiance drest:
Dark as his own Escurial, all in vain
He hears the laughter of his gladsome train,
And scans with gloomy eye his royal close,
Nor gets him joy of all his goodly Spain:
—Above all flowers my spirit loves the Rose.

ENVOI

A poet once beyond the Eastern main
Made in the Rose's praise his sweet refrain
By flowery meadows where the Oxus flows:
So in this latter day I sing my strain—
Above all flowers my spirit loves the Rose.

XXXIII

BALLADE FOR SINGERS

Now be we glum or be we gay
May Music ne'er our lips forsake,
For give us lute or fife to play
And any prize is ours to take ;
For lamb and lion, hawk and snake,
And rocks that followed, throng on throng,
When Orpheus in their language spake,
All own the mastery of song.

And every fair and winsome fay,
And every fop and ruffling rake,
And Jews that hug their golden prey,
And sparks that blood alone can slake,
And monks that prayer and fasting make,
And Love, that hales us swift along
With tiny chains that none may break,
All own the mastery of song.

And they that dwell in courts, for aye
Consumed with envy's fret and ache,

Or hold in woods their roundelay
 Like nightingale from out the brake,
 And peer and peasant, Duke and Jake,
And might of monarchs, stern and strong,
 And lonely Lady of the Lake,
All own the mastery of song.

ENVOI

Hear, Prince, for thy contentment's sake—
 Hast found thy wooing hard and long?
Then learn with song her love to wake—
 All own the mastery of song.

XXXIV

BALLADE OF THE MERRY SONG OF THE HORN

E'EN as a merry tempest roars,
By spell of wizard haply freed,
The horn's clear note of silver soars
To wanton with the winds that speed
With music o'er the upland mead :
—Ye scarlet huntsmen, rouse the morn !
Above the cry of hound and steed
How blithely rings the lusty horn !

The golden flood the morning pours
Lights all the darkling ways that lead
From thickets that the day abhors,
For wolves a haven good at need !
The hunt is up, and from the lead
Ho ! Tally-ho ! the cry is borne ;
And hark ! to grace each gallant deed
How blithely rings the lusty horn !

And lo ! the rugged mountain scaurs
 As fiery hours to dawn succeed
Are red with rubies, rich as shores
 Of Asia show to miser's greed :
 And soon the giant boar shall bleed
By spear and fang asunder torn ;
—Hurrah, ye hounds of royal breed,
How blithely rings the lusty horn !

ENVOI

What poet's music thus can plead ?
 The pack would cry them all to scorn !
And down the wind that wakes the reed
 How blithely rings the lusty horn !

XXXV

BALLADE OF THE HOLY VIRGIN

Mother of Heaven! after the singer brave
François Villon, who in his sin's despite
By prayer and faith to grace eternal clave,
And made his deathless Ballade to thy might,
I too would sing thy glory infinite.
All power encompasseth thy queenly head,
The wings of majesty above thee spread,
Night veils thine eyes with all her quivering gold,
All peace is thine, thou Lily that light dost shed,
Lady of Heaven, within thy starry hold.

Thou without blemish, hear our cry and save.
Save, save us from the phantoms that affright!

Come thou in power, and still the tongues that rave,
And guide our steps that stray in utter night.
Shine, Gate of Gold! appear, thou Tower of Light!
For Sin pursues us, sore discomfited,
And in the awful darkness of the dead
The hunters fierce of hell their toils unfold:
Then, hear us, thou whose Son hath striven and bled,
Lady of Heaven, within thy starry hold!

Pluck thou the sick, the sleeper from the grave!
For oft the ocean fell with darkness dight
Smiles on our sorrow with forgetful wave,
And lies in radiant glory, calm and bright
As pools in which the thirsty hinds delight.
Till lo, he rises from a wrathful bed,
And whelms the mariner in tempest dread,
The masts are snapped, the sails are seaward rolled,
But thou dost take him when his soul is sped,
Lady of Heaven, within thy starry hold!

ENVOI

Giver of grace and mercy's fountain-head,
Lighten the black and bitter path we tread,
And from our quailing sight each chasm fold :
So shall we know not death, but life instead,
Lady of Heaven, within thy starry hold !

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XXXVI

BALLADE TO THE READER

(On composing the last of his Ballades)

Gentle friend and reader, fill thy glass with wine,
List this latest ballade made for thy delight:
'Twas but now I saw the radiant song-god shine,
Lord of golden arrows, swift to heal or smite:
In his trail I followed, caught the fleeting light,
Wove of song and sunlight to pleasure thee this lay:
Deem it not the utterance of a soul astray,
Nay, for in this age of fops and folk distraught
Thanks to sweet Euterpe, to whom her poets pray,
Ballades six-and-thirty this my hand hath wrought.

Men before me, singers who loved the light divine,
Yearning ever upward toward the stormy height,
Have sought amid the lightnings, with unamazéd eyne,
And hearts whose high endeavour no peril may affright
Gems of wondrous water that mock our quailing sight.
Marot, prince of singers, and he, the Fabler gay,
Villon, lord of language, have gone their starry way,
But blither than these song-smiths, whom Phoebus' self hath taught,
Or him that finds a diamond whose price no king can pay,
Ballades six-and-thirty this my hand hath wrought.

Reader dear, for joy alone of thee and thine
Fashioned I these silver songs with mirth and might;
Sing them in the woodland, beneath the singing pine,
Sing them in the meadow, gold- and purple-dight,
Straying with thy Lady by moony skies and bright.

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Far within the forest, 'neath the night of May,
Sings the lonely nightingale her wondrous roundelay,
Pouring out her spirit with pain and passion fraught :
So my heart within me sings at eve of day—
Ballades six-and-thirty this my hand hath wrought.

ENVOI

Reader, thou whose praises all my pains repay,
Toward the double summit where the lightnings play
Striving ever upward my soul her Song hath sought :
—Were they all in vain then, the pains and peril ? Nay !
Ballades six-and-thirty this my hand hath wrought !

DIZAIN TO VILLON

Poor Villon, thou whose fame is pierced and torn
Like the soft maid at Aulis doomed to die,
So many liars having loosed in scorn
Their wanton shafts against thee, I deny
All, lord and master, save thy genius high.
Ah, rover, sleeping sound upon the sod,
Who brought us fire from heaven, splendour-shod,
And still with terror in thine eyes and soul,
Thy booty rare, 'twas filched from none but God!
Ay, thou didst steal—but as Prometheus stole!

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